Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

MHR Connections

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2014 Human Rights Awards Announced

As human rights awareness becomes part of our province's identity, The Human Rights Awards offer a chance to recognize those who continue to fight for equality.

The Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Human Rights Commission proudly announce the recipients of the 2014 Human Rights Awards. These awards are given out every year in celebration of International Human Rights Day.

The Annual Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba recognizes those who have promoted respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and have advanced the rights of Manitobans.

The Recipients of the 2014 Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba are:

PRIDE Winnipeg – On August 2, 1987, about 250 people marched in Winnipeg's first Pride Day. It was a brave step – a tentative venture out of a dark closet that for too long confined the spirits of those who belong to Winnipeg's LGBTTQ* community. Today, an estimated 35,000 attended the 2014 Pride Winnipeg Festival to celebrate their many victories and their diverse community, and to remember that there is so much to be proud of and thankful for. ***Winnipeg Pride is the Pride of the Prairies*** – one of the largest celebrations of LGBTTQ* culture between Toronto and Vancouver.

Rana Abdulla – A mother and a professional accountant, Rana is also a fearless pioneer for the rights of immigrants and refugees. Her human rights activism has its origins in her heritage as the Kuwait-born child of Palestinian refugees. She has a deep and profound respect and desire for advancing the cause of human rights and cross-cultural understanding and respect. When she becomes aware of an opportunity to be of assistance to people fleeing violence, oppression and dispossession, particularly people from the Arab world, Rana always finds a way in which to ease distress, guide and support such victims towards a safe future in which they might experience stability, dignity and empowerment to rebuild their lives.

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THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

www.manitobahumanrights.ca

The Rights Connection
by Azim Jiwa - Executive Director

December 3, is International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The goal of this day is to promote an understanding of people with disabilities and encourage support for their dignity, rights and well-being.

Those words are a direction but need to be followed with action.

As with every year, the United Nations selects awareness themes for this day. This year one of those themes is "Creating Enabling Work Environments." I would like to look at that theme simply as employment opportunities and the value of accommodating employees with disabilities.

There is no doubt that employing people with disabilities in inclusive and rewarding work remains a challenge. In a 2012 BMO study it was found that the majority of small businesses (69 per cent) have never hired a person with a visible or invisible disability.

The study also found that of the approximately 16 per cent of Canadians with a disability, 30 per cent are able and want to work. However, they are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as people who do not have a disability. It is suggested that long standing myths and misperceptions continue to get in the way. Two of the biggest myths have to do with the cost of accommodation and performance. Many hiring managers overestimate the cost and assume a potential employee would not be able to perform the job.

Dispelling well established myths is tough, but not insurmountable. The same study found the average cost for those requiring accommodation is $500 and that most small and large businesses could afford this. However, when the respondents to the survey were asked how much the average accommodation cost would be, the response was on average $10,000, a significant overestimation.

There is the second myth suggesting that a potential employee with a disability would not be able to perform the job. This stigma certainly is not only untrue; there is no evidence to back it up. The 2012 BMO survey agrees, finding that after recruiting disabled workers, employers stated these employees either met their expectations (62 per cent) or exceeded them (15 per cent).

Our awareness theme for December 3, 2014 is to get past the myths and, instead look at reality and encourage hiring practices that include people with disabilities.

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Althea Guiboche – Also known as "the Bannock Lady", Althea is a single mother of seven children, living in the North End of Winnipeg. She has spent the last several years galvanizing support for her initiative to improve circumstances for Winnipeg's most vulnerable, by making bannock and distributing it to Winnipeg's homeless population every week. Her strong belief is that "we are a global village – we are one race – the human race – and no one should be on the street homeless and hungry."

The Annual Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award recognizes the work of a person or group of people, 25 years old and under, that has had an impact on the advancement of human rights as guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and human rights legislation in Manitoba.

The recipient of the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth award for 2014 is:

Alana Robert – Alana is a tireless, young advocate who works to instill positive change, justice, and the advancement of human rights in both Manitoba and abroad. Alana has worked extensively with social justice initiatives since she was in high school, and continues to educate, fundraise, and advocate. The highlights of Alana's human rights work includes: 1 of 7 students across the country to be a World Vision Canadian Youth Ambassador, World Vision University of Manitoba Student Group President, Justice For Women University of Manitoba Student Group Founder & President, and as a Métis student, Alana is very involved with the Aboriginal community.

Everyone is encouraged to attend the award reception in honour of this year's recipients.

The Human Rights Reception honouring the award recipients

When: December 9, 2014 from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm.

Where: Union Centre 206-275 Broadway, Winnipeg

How to register for tickets: www.manitobahumanrights.ca and click on Human Rights Awards 2014

The event is free and light refreshments will be served. Please note that you must register to attend.

Legal update:

On November 25 and 26 the Commission's Legal Counsel Isha Khan argued that a young woman had been sexually harassed by her former employer at a public adjudication.

The Commission will now wait for the decision of Adjudicator Peter Sim, which will be posted on our website once available. The Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioners requested an adjudicator in July 2014 and the case was presented before the independent adjudicator in Winkler, and in Winnipeg.

Former Chairperson Ken Filkow had no illusions of human rights challenges

"Over my tenure as Chair, I will remember with fondness the excitement of brainstorming public stands and positions."

In December 1988 Ken Filkow took over the reins of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission as Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners. He had his work cut out for him. The new *Human Rights Code* was merely a year old and there was a lot of work and public awareness left to be done. Ken continued to sit as Chairperson for an unprecedented 13 years.

Late last month Ken Filkow passed away.

His last work for the Commission was writing a message reflecting on his years at the Commission in the 2000 Annual report.

He began this message reflecting on the beginning of human rights legislation and the role of the Canada's growing number of Commissions. "These agencies pioneered and struggled, as most pioneers do, in gaining acceptability, credibility and effectiveness. Prior to their creation a person who had suffered differential treatment by reason of race, source of income, gender or other characteristics had no recourse to any government agency or to the court system," he wrote.

He referred to the Manitoba Commission as part of the vanguard of pursuing human rights issues to the highest levels of court. Specifically he referred two Manitoba complaints, one based on pregnancy and the other on sexual harassment going to the Supreme Court of Canada. In the first case the Court held that pregnancy was a legitimate gender issue that had to be accommodated in the work place. In the other case, the Court determined that sexual harassment was included as part of discrimination based on sex. "Both decisions proved to be highly consequential to Commissions across the country and to the shaping of public attitudes in a positive way. The Commission takes pride in having committed itself to seeing the actions through." Even in 2000 Ken, although recognizing significant accomplishments, also knew that "there can be no illusions that there are still wide spread unattractive and disturbing attitudes in our community."

Ken Filkow rose to the challenge of human rights knowing that his successors would continue to face significant challenges.

The present staff and Commissioners send their condolences to his family and friends.